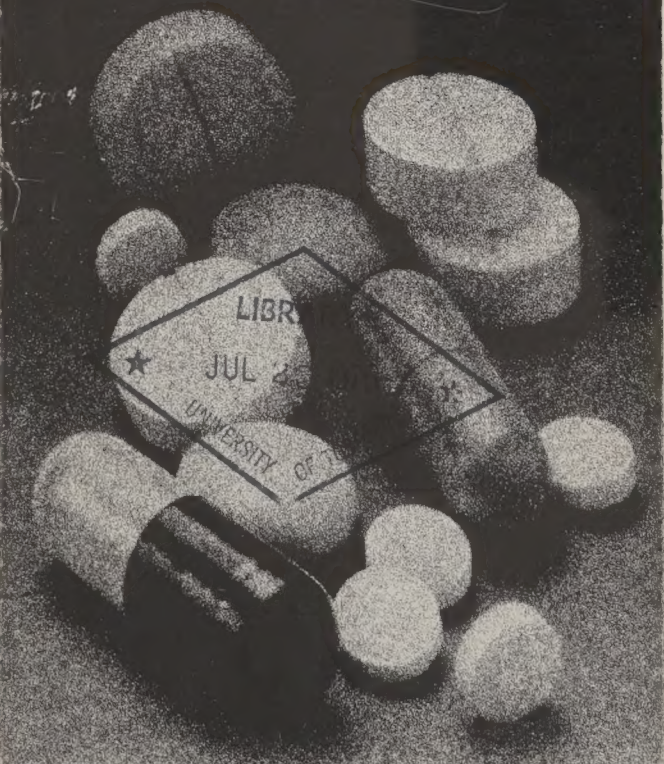


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PAIN PILLS

WHAT THEY DO FOR YOU
WHAT THEY DO TO YOU



Ontario Ministry of Health
Pamphlets P-15

WHAT'S IN A PAIN PILL?

When most people feel the need for relief from pain, they reach for acetylsalicylic acid, more commonly known as ASA — or by various well-known trade names (Aspirin, Acetophen). Whatever name it goes by, ASA is a minor but effective analgesic (pain-killer).

ASA is also the major ingredient of many other remedies — cold capsules, headache tablets, buffered formulas, and others.

There are minor analgesics, not containing ASA, which your doctor may wish to recommend, but ASA is, by and large, safe when properly used.

Major analgesics, such as narcotics, should be used only for major pain, only by prescription, and only under a doctor's care.

If you have a pain that requires the continuous use of a pain-killer, you should seek medical advice. The pain could be a signal of something else that requires attention. Pain pills may not be the answer for you.

HOW DO YOU PICK A PAIN PILL?

ASA comes in all shapes, forms and sizes. You can buy ASA alone, with codeine, with caffeine, with decongestants, or buffered. You can buy it in small tablets for children (1¼ grain or 75 mg.), regular tablets for adults (5 grain or 300 mg.), or extra-strength tablets (7½ grain or 450 mg.).

You can buy it in liquid, coated form, suppository form, capsule, or plain white pills. How do you know what's best for you? Before you decide, here are some simple observations.

Generally, the relief you get from a cold remedy comes not from the decongestant, (which, in the dosage available without prescription, is not very effective) but from the ASA. Besides, decongestants can be

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dangerous to some people because they may raise blood pressure.

Buffered ASA, or ASA with an antacid, is all right if you prefer it or if the doctor recommends it. But you'll get as much buffering by taking your tablets with a small glass of milk.

Arthritic or extra-strong formulas contain no special magic; they merely contain an extra measure of ASA — 7½ grains (450 mg.), instead of the usual five grains (300 mg.). Read the label if you're unsure.

Some pain remedies consist of ASA mixed with a small dose of caffeine — as much as you'd get in about a quarter cup of coffee.

ASA with codeine can be useful for some kinds of pain. Unlike plain ASA, which is routinely available in many stores, ASA compound with codeine (also known as AC&C or under a trade name) can be purchased only from a pharmacist, although you won't need a prescription. When pain pills have more than 7½ mg. of codeine they are available only by prescription.

Specialized forms of ASA are sometimes suggested by your doctor; don't buy them unless he tells you to do so. They do have advantages, but they have disadvantages, too. A liquid can be useful for children, since it's less irritating to the stomach; but it's also hard to measure accurately. Suppositories are sometimes used for a patient with ulcers — but only a doctor can decide when this is necessary, and he may prefer to substitute another drug altogether. Enteric coated tablets, which break down in the intestine instead of in the stomach, may also be useful for some patients who must take ASA regularly and can wait longer for relief. Don't use specialized forms of ASA unless your doctor recommends them.



Better health
for a better life

Ministry of Health
Hon. Frank S. Miller,
Minister

Children's size tablets can be useful. They dissolve easily. They're less irritating to the stomach. Their taste appeals to small children who might otherwise resist taking pills. But that's their greatest danger, too. A child should always be told this is medicine. Never tell children that ASA is candy.

What kind of pain pill should you buy? Here's a simple rule: unless your doctor suggests otherwise, buy the simplest ASA tablet available, in children's or adult strength. It'll save you money.

FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS

As a general rule, ASA is a safe and effective drug. But no drug is effective unless it's used according to directions.

ASA works by blocking the pain impulses in the brain's central nervous system. Besides being a pain-reliever, ASA acts as an anti-pyretic or fever reducer. And it has a mild anti-inflammatory effect on congestion.

As well, ASA is useful for rheumatoid arthritis, under doctor's supervision. In this case it's not ASA's pain-relieving effect that helps. It's ASA's effect on the inflammatory process in the joints.

ASA is basically for use in the case of local irritation or pain, minor headaches, fever, coughs or colds. The maximum dose at all times is two tablets, unless your doctor suggests otherwise.

NOW, THE BAD NEWS

ASA is not always effective, nor should it always be used. It's not strong enough for severe pain, and not suitable for some kinds of pain.

Every ASA tablet you take creates some bleeding in the lining of your stomach. Although in most cases this disadvantage is

more than offset by the benefits of the drug, it's important to remember that ASA should never be taken in the case of stomach upset.

It should never be taken by a person with stomach or duodenal ulcers.

It should never be taken for chest pains.

It should never be taken during pregnancy without the advice of a physician.

It should never be taken when the diagnosis is not clear.

It should never be taken by patients receiving anticoagulant (blood-thinning) drugs, without the doctor's specific permission.

And it probably won't have much effect on some kinds of pain — leg cramps, for instance, which are usually caused by a metabolic upset.

It shouldn't be taken as a sedative: it may upset the stomach and have the opposite effect. A warm glass of milk is better.

It shouldn't be taken for gout, unless your doctor suggests it. Although useful at times, a dose of the wrong size can, in fact, aggravate the condition.

It shouldn't be taken for prolonged periods of time except under a doctor's supervision.

Besides gastric irritation (which can, in most cases be eased with a little milk), ASA in normal therapeutic doses can occasionally produce other side effects. A few people may have skin eruptions similar to acne or eczema; a very few have a true allergic reaction with weals and itching of the skin. If used habitually, it can also affect the blood cells and reduce normal clotting.

And finally, taking more than the amount recommended on the bottle, without your doctor's advice, will increase the possibility of stomach irritation and the danger of toxicity.

DANGER! AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

If a child (or adult) accidentally swallows a quantity of ASA tablets or other remedies containing ASA, it is an acute medical emergency. Don't wait to speak to the doctor; *get to the hospital*. In fact, don't even wait for an ambulance — get a police car, get a neighbor, get in your own car and go. Salicylate poisoning can be a killer, particularly for children under two years of age. It is responsible for half the drug poisoning emergencies in hospitals today. The major danger is in adult strength tablets left within reach of children (children's tablets are sold in bottles of limited size).

Here are some symptoms of salicylate poisoning: confusion, depression, muscle twitchings, irregular, heavy breathing or panting, and coma.

If the child is discovered within less than five minutes (no more) of taking the ASA, and before any of the above symptoms have shown, force vomiting by putting your finger down the child's throat or administering Ipecac (which should be no more than two years old, or it will have lost its potency). Don't fool around with any other method of inducing vomiting and don't do this if the child is at all drowsy or depressed. In any case, it is important to get to the hospital as soon as possible.

Another point; remember to take with you the bottle that contained the medication. Some pills contain codeine and can cause complications which require somewhat different treatment.

Less critical, but nonetheless dangerous, is another type of ASA poisoning known as salicylism. This is chronic poisoning, caused by large doses over a long period of time. It results in headache, dizziness, ringing in the

ears, drowsiness, nausea, diarrhoea, and can also lead to liver and internal complications.

NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY

If you must keep pain pills in the house — and most people do — here are some simple pieces of advice.

Keep them well out of reach, *preferably in a locked cabinet*.

- Buy pain remedies in small quantities. You may save some money on the giant size bottle, but the smallest size may save a life.
- Although ASA is generally stable, it can deteriorate in warmth and moisture. If kept too long it develops a vinegary, acid smell and is very irritating to the stomach. Another reason for buying small quantities.
- When child-resistant packages are available in over-the-counter medications, support them by choosing these over the regular packages.
- No drug is safe unless it's used according to directions and kept out of the reach of children's hands.
- Remember, don't take ASA in the case of pregnancy, stomach or duodenal ulcers, stomach upset, chest pains, gout, or while on anticoagulant drugs, except on doctor's advice. And don't take ASA habitually unless your doctor has advised you to do so.